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THE GREAT OBSTACLE IN THE WAY OF A REUNION OF CHRISTENDOM.

BY PROFESSOR CHARLES A. BRIGGS, D.D.

It is a happy circumstance that so eminent, broad-minded and warm-hearted a prelate as the Archbishop of St. Paul should undertake to comment on my article in this REVIEW, "The Real and Ideal in the Papacy,"* and to answer the question, "Is the Papacy an Obstacle to the Reunion of Christendom?" We agree that the ideal Papacy is one of the chief principles in the unity of Christendom; we disagree in the question whether it is the only principle; and also whether the real Papacy, as it has existed in Christian history since the separation of the Eastern Church and the Western, and especially since the separation of the Protestant Churches from the Papal dominion, has been an obstacle to the reunion of Christendom.

The answer of the Archbishop of St. Paul to this question is in the most irenic spirit, and with a disposition to make all the concessions that he can properly make in view of his doctrine of the Papacy. These concessions are, indeed, so many and so valuable as to make it evident that irenic Roman Catholics and irenic Protestants are not so far apart as is commonly supposed.

It is first necessary to discuss the difference between us in our conception of the ideal Papacy. I regret that I cannot accept the statement of my critic when he says:

"Peter holds the keys of the Kingdom: he is the absolute master. Whatsoever he binds is bound; whatsoever he looses is loosed; his power extends over the whole sphere of the Kingdom, over all its activities; it is shortened by no power or right confided to others."

* Professor Briggs's article, "The Real and the Ideal in the Papacy," was published in the REVIEW dated February 15, 1907; Archbishop Ireland's rejoinder, entitled "Is the Papacy an Obstacle to the Reunion of Christendom?" appeared in the REVIEW dated April 5, 1907. The publication of Dr. Briggs's present article, which was written shortly after the latter date, has been unavoidably delayed.—Ed. N. A. R.

I fully recognize the primacy of St. Peter and his successors in the possession of the keys of the Kingdom, but not their exclusive possession of this authority. How can any one do so in face of the words of Jesus to the Apostles and to the Church? Jesus said, not only to St. Peter, but to all the Apostles and through them to their successors:

“Receive the Holy Spirit; whosoever sins ye remit, they shall be remitted; whosoever sins ye retain, they shall be retained” (John 20: 22, 23).

At an earlier date Jesus had said:

“If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 18: 15-18).

In the great commission, on which the authority of the Christian ministry chiefly depends, Jesus did not give the authority to St. Peter alone, but to the entire Apostolate and its successors, when he said:

“All authority is given to me in heaven and on earth. Go ye, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world” (Matthew 28: 18-20).

It is evident, therefore, that the power of St. Peter and his successors was shortened by power and right given to the Apostolic ministry, and to the Church. Therefore, I said: “The three constituents necessary to complete unity are the Pope, the ministry and the people, a threefold cord that should not be broken.” The learned Archbishop recognizes: “That there is in Christian unity a threefold element is true in a sense. The Papacy, the ministry and the people make up the Church; the Papacy cannot be thought of without ministers and without people, any more than in any organism the head can be thought of without members.” But here his metaphor misleads him, when he says:

“but that a portion of the ministry, or a portion of the people, cut off from the Papacy, can still hold that they are within the lines of Christian unity is no more conceivable than would be the claim that certain members, separated from the head or trunk, no longer deriving from the head the current of life and motion, are still parts of the physical organism.” To this it might be said that the current of life and motion does not in the human body come from the head, but from the heart in the body, and that the head is rather dependent upon the body than the body on the head; in fact, neither can exist without the other. But a society, whether Christian or otherwise, is something more than the physical organism of the human body. Such a society, as history and experience show, may exist without an executive, or even without a ministerial body. The only thing that is absolutely essential is the people that constitute its membership. They may combine in themselves all the functions of government, except so far as they may delegate these to temporary representatives. For a social organism the head is the least important of the three; the head and ministry will perish without the people, but the society may live on without them if such a necessity should arise.

Surely it is going to the brink of dangerous error to say that the condition of membership in the visible body of the Church “is union with the Pope, the successor of Peter”; and that “priests and bishops they may be, validly ordained, deriving their sacred character from Christ, through Apostolic succession; yet, they are not of the Church, unless they are with Peter and of Peter.” For the Catholic doctrine is that a valid baptism is the mode of entrance into the Church; and all that are baptized, in the name of the Holy Trinity by the use of water, are members of the Church and are subject to its discipline, whether heretics or not. And all who are “validly ordained, deriving their sacred character from Christ through Apostolic succession,” are bishops and priests of the Church and subject to its jurisdiction, even if schismatic and rebellious. I cannot understand how a Roman Catholic prelate can take any other position.

Even if the Greeks, Orientals, and Protestants of every name, be heretical and schismatic, contumacious and rebellious, they yet are baptized members of Christ's Church, and at least a large part of them have a ministry validly ordained, as Rome

admits. Much the larger part of the Christian Church is separated from Rome. The successor of St. Peter rules over only a minority of the Christian Church. These separated Christians are organized as Christian Churches; they have multitudes of baptized Christians submitting to the government of an Apostolic ministry; they have, therefore, two of the three principles of unity given by Jesus Christ. The absence of the third principle, however important it may be, is not so essential that it destroys altogether the unity of Christ's Church. We are entitled to raise the question whether the Papacy does not in fact violate the unity of the Church still more than they, when it absorbs into itself, as an absolute despotism, not only its own historic rights, but also those of the episcopate and of the Christian ministry and people.

The primitive Church does not favor, but condemns with no uncertain voice, the claim for an unlimited jurisdiction of the Pope. The bishops of Asia did not recognize the sovereignty of the Pope, when he strove to impose upon the Orient the Roman custom of the celebration of Easter; nor did Irenæus of Gaul, when, as Eusebius tells us, "he fittingly admonished Victor." Victor was in this respect guilty of an intrusion into the rights and privileges of the bishops of Asia. Dionysius, the Bishop of Alexandria, writes to the Bishop of Rome as to a brother, seeking his advice; not as to a superior looking for a command. Cyprian had very exalted ideas as to the episcopate and the Roman see, but he refused absolute authority. He said: "For neither did Peter, whom first the Lord chose, and upon whom He built His Church, when Paul disputed with him afterwards about circumcision, claim anything to himself insolently, nor arrogantly assume anything so as to say that he held the primacy, and that he ought to be obeyed by novices and those lately come" (Ep. VII: 1-3).

The Popes now claim the exclusive right to summon Christian Councils; but all the primitive Councils, all those recognized as valid by other Christian Churches than Rome, were summoned by the Emperors and not by the Popes; and none of them recognized the supreme legislative and judicial function of the Popes; but exercised these functions themselves, even to the extent of condemning a Pope as heretical.

There is room for difference of opinion as to the rights and

wrongs in the divisions of the Church. Candid historians, who rise above prejudice, whether Catholic or Protestant, recognize faults on both sides; but the fundamental fault in all these cases was, if I mistake not, the claim for unlimited jurisdiction by the Popes, and the pressing of that claim to intolerable despotism. It cannot be conceded that: "In the Orient, the cause was pride and ambition in Photius, first, and, later, in Michael Cærularius;" although we admit the "unconquerable jealousy of 'Old Rome' in Emperors and courtiers of the 'New Rome,'" not, however, without cause in the ever-increasing pretensions of the Popes. It is far from the facts of history to say that: "In Germany, the preaching of Tetzels and the '*Gravamina*' counted for less, as causes, than the personal waywardness and recklessness of character of Martin Luther, and the political ambition and the inordinate greed of princes and barons." The Reformation was the inevitable result of the intolerable usurpations of the Popes, which the Councils of Constance and Basle tried in vain to resist and restrict. The Reformers, sustained by the Catholic Emperor and all irenic divines, demanded another Council to reform the Church. The Protestants declined eventually to attend the Council of Trent because their doctrine had been condemned already in their absence; and there was no possibility of their getting a decent hearing.

If we should grant that the Roman Church had the right to continue to hold Œcumenical Councils after the greater part of Christianity refused its absolutism; and that it had a right to make binding decisions of doctrines of faith and morals, and to exclude from the discussion the representatives of the separated bodies that it regarded as schismatic and heretical; and that the only thing Rome can now consistently do is to invite the representatives of these bodies to a friendly conference in any future Council; then Christian courtesy, as well as Christian prudence, in view of the vast importance of the reunion of Christendom, should induce the Popes, as I doubt not the Archbishop of St. Paul would agree, to strain the bonds of charity to their utmost extent, not to take advantage of the necessities of the Greeks, as they did at the Council of Florence, nor to decide the most important questions, as they did at Trent, before inviting the Protestants to appear as already condemned before them; but to give them a full, attentive, patient and loving

hearing, with an earnest desire to remove all their difficulties so far as truth and honor permitted. The reopening of doctrine and institutions, already decided by Papal or Conciliary decrees, does not in itself imply any question of their authority; but it raises the question whether these may not be restated, as many others have often been in the history of the Church, in such simple, comprehensive and irenic terms as to remove difficulties and win acceptance. I firmly believe that such a thing is possible, if only the one great obstacle to the reunion of Christendom could be removed.

The amiable prelate of St. Paul does not appreciate the serious difficulties that confront the Protestant mind as it recalls the mischief wrought in the world by the insistence of the Roman Curia upon its absolute and unlimited jurisdiction.

The position that I have taken with reference to the Papacy is that of many of the most eminent Protestant divines, such as Melancthon, Grotius and Leibnitz, who in their time seriously considered the problem of the reunion of Christendom and earnestly labored for its accomplishment. All irenic movements, however successful they have been in reconciling differences of doctrine and institution, have been wrecked on one and the same rock of offence. Those who recognize the historic and valid jurisdiction of the Popes, in accordance with the teaching of Jesus Christ our Saviour, and the consent of the ancient Catholic Church, are not thereby compelled to acknowledge an unlimited jurisdiction, such as was claimed by the Popes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

We recognize the jurisdiction of the President of the United States, but that jurisdiction is defined by the Constitution of our country; and, if he overstep these definitions, we do not hesitate to condemn him and resist him. The American Colonies recognized the supreme jurisdiction of the King of England; but, when he exceeded the constitutional limits of his jurisdiction and committed acts of oppression and tyranny, the American Colonies rebelled, and in the Revolution established the United States of America as a separate nation. So, in the Christian Church, the jurisdiction of the Pope is limited by the divine teaching of Holy Scripture, and by the unanimous consent of the Christian Fathers. This limitation is incidentally and implicitly contained in the decrees of the Vatican Council. If the

Popes transgress these limits, do they not justify resistance and, if necessary, revolution? This is a question which would be answered differently by different natures at different times. Among the Reformers of the sixteenth century, Luther and Melancthon, Zwingli and Calvin, Cranmer and Knox answered it, under the constraint of adverse circumstances, by reformation outside the Roman Church; Erasmus, Sir Thomas More, Stautpitz, Gropper and others, under more favorable circumstances, by reformation within the Church.

One extreme usually gives birth to its opposite. It is evident that present-day Protestantism will never abandon its extreme until the claim for an unlimited jurisdiction of the Popes is also abandoned. The ground on which alone a reunion is possible is that stated by the greatest of all Catholic peacemakers, Cassander, who, in 1564, at the request of the Emperor Ferdinand and his son Maximilian, proposed a platform of reconciliation in which he urged the limitation of the jurisdiction of the Popes to that which Jesus Christ prescribed in the Gospel and the primitive Church recognized. The pathway to reunion is to constitutionalize the Papacy.

The policy of unlimited jurisdiction resulted in the forfeiture of jurisdiction altogether for the greater part of the Christian world. The strength of the separated Christian bodies has greatly increased since the sixteenth century. The Greek Church is no longer in that terrible crisis which, in the fifteenth century, compelled the Greek Emperor to seek reconciliation with Rome; it has the great Russian Empire at its back. The Protestant bodies no longer are on the defensive in ruinous religious wars; they have the three most powerful nations in the world on their side, Great Britain, Germany and the United States. The Catholic nations are all feeble in comparison, and two of the most important of these, France and Italy, are in open war with the Papacy, in which the majority of voters, nominally Catholic, are arrayed against the authorities of their own Church. And in several other Catholic nations the incipient stages of a similar conflict are easily to be seen. I am not proposing to discuss the rights and wrongs of these conflicts. In many cases, both in ancient and modern times, the Popes have been contending for their just, historic rights; but the difficulty in many cases has been that exclusive claims have weakened the force of right-

ful claims. He who claims too much is usually in danger of losing all.

When one contemplates the happy condition of the Catholic Church in the United States, and compares it with the sad condition of the Catholic Church in the Catholic countries of Europe, one can hardly escape the conclusion that the chief reason for the difference is that the Papacy does not attempt to exercise such an unlimited jurisdiction in the United States as it battles for in the Catholic countries of Europe.

The policy of unlimited jurisdiction and absolute submission weakens the power of the Catholic Church. In a conversation with the present Pope, two years ago, we were talking of the obstacles to the reunion of Christendom. I said to him that, if the obstacles were to be removed, there must be freedom to investigate the difficulties. He said that all reasonable freedom of investigation should be given. If only the Pope would in some way make good his word, and guarantee Catholic scholars reasonable liberty of investigation of the great problems that divide Christendom and obstruct the unity of the Church, I am sure that a splendid array of Catholic scholars would spring up, and with the cooperation of Protestant scholars of the same spirit, the hard problems would be solved, and the unity of the Church secured. Scholarship demands liberty; it cannot thrive under a policy of suppression and absolute submission to an unlimited jurisdiction, and to immeasurable claims, which may easily be extended to cover any and every traditional opinion of scholastic philosophy, mediæval law and patristic exegesis.

The claim to an unlimited jurisdiction by the Papacy may be justly challenged, because the Papal administration is not sufficiently well organized to give just and valid decisions of all questions. It is not the Pope himself who makes the decisions, but the Congregations in which the Roman administration is organized. The Pope simply endorses their action as an executive, if he does not veto it or postpone it. Under these conditions, the Pope is only nominally responsible; we cannot be sure that the decisions express his mature and final judgment.

These Congregations are composed, as every one knows, chiefly of Italians, and these in large part from Southern Italy. From the very nature of the case, they look at everything from a provincial and Italian point of view: they cannot put off the

characteristics of their race, their nationality and their training. It is not a question now of the Pope, but of the Cardinals and monsignors who reside in Rome, and the other humbler members of the Congregations that transact the business of the Church. They do not belong to the divine constitution of the Church, but to the human side of it; and history and experience show that they are very human. The question is not of the jurisdiction of the Pope, but of the jurisdiction of the Curia—of the Black Pope and the Red Pope, and of little popes of every color and shape, who administer the affairs of the Church with an arbitrariness and tyranny that the Popes themselves, owing to their more serious responsibilities, would not think of. These counsellors of the Popes are often not those whom he would prefer, but an inheritance from one or more previous administrations. These not infrequently advise him in their own interests, and not in that of the Church; and they sometimes, by indirection, obstruct and thwart his policy; and they are ever especially hostile to any and every kind of reform. Entrenched in Rome, and perpetuating themselves from generation to generation, they are now, as they ever have been, the petty tyrants of the Catholic world. In any other matter than religion, Roman Catholics would regard it as intolerable that all questions should be decided by men of another nation, with a demand for absolute submission.

When one considers the qualification of the members of the Curia, one must admit their very great ability and learning in Canon Law, in the Ceremonies of the Church, and in Scholastic Theology; but they are sadly deficient in Biblical and Historical scholarship. In fact, a very considerable number of the greatest Biblical scholars and historians of the Catholic Church have been, and now are, in discredit at Rome; and many of their best works have been put on the Index. The Curia is altogether disqualified to make decisions in an immense range of questions that interest the modern world. Furthermore, the Curia is antiquated in its methods, as well as in its organization. These have nothing whatever to do with the divine constitution of the Church. It is entirely within the authority of the Pope to transform the administration and the methods, modernize them and make them more efficient. But as they are at present, a Catholic scholar has the right to challenge their competence in

many things, without disrespect to the authority of the Pope, and without raising any question as to the divine constitution of the Church.

I must think that the Archbishop of St. Paul agrees with me in recognition of many of the mistakes of the Curia and of the Popes; but it is difficult to see how, on his principle of recognizing, in theory, the absolute supremacy of the Pope, the Church can have any guarantee for the present or the future against the repetition of these evils. The Archbishop says: "Counsellors the Pope will gather around him; vicars and delegates he will have to divide with him the labor of his office; but the Supreme Master, in last resort, he will ever remain." If this statement be correct, the Pope is essentially an absolute sovereign with no one on earth to check his will. He may be a Gregory the Great, or he may be a Borgia; who can tell?

But, in fact, the Archbishop does not really hold to such an unlimited jurisdiction. In his discussion of details, he agrees so closely with what I have said in my article, that I see no valid reason why we might not eventually agree altogether. I am inclined to think that he represents fairly well the views of the present Pontiff. The Archbishop limits the jurisdiction of the Papacy by ruling out "jurisdiction in civil affairs, and dominion over civil governments"; by agreeing to a limitation of the Papal domain to a limited territory, such as the District of Columbia; and by agreeing to a number of other limitations with certain qualifications that seem for the most part quite reasonable. I cordially accept his statement that "if purely civil matters are in issue the Pope has no right whatsoever to give directions to Catholics." I do admit, as he thinks I will, "that the question changes when issues under consideration are such as appertain to the religious conscience, and demand solution in the light of religious principles." I agree also to the wise words that "the Papacy possesses no right to determine questions of science and philosophy, of sociology and economics. The realm of the Papacy is faith and morals,—that much and nothing more. The situation changes, of course, when speculation, clothed in the garb of science or philosophy, of sociology or economics, soars into the domain of faith and morals, and challenges the Church within its own sphere." If the Archbishop is correct, and I think he is, that the present Pope himself holds to such limita-

tions of his authority, what reasonable objection can there be to put such and the like limitations in the form of a written constitution, in order to keep aggressive spirits within those limits. Such a constitution would not deprive the Popes of any of their Biblical or historical rights, but might save future Popes, and more especially the Curia, from repeating the errors and blunders of the past. Still more, such a constitution would do much to conciliate many of those who cannot in good conscience submit to the Papacy under present conditions. In my opinion, it would remove the greatest barrier to the reunion of Christendom.

It is quite true that difficulties would still remain. Even with a written constitution, it would not be conceded by modern governments or by modern scholarship that the Curia should have the final right of interpreting that constitution. To no one man, even if he be Pope, can be safely entrusted the final decision as to the extent of his own powers. The repeated overruling of the French episcopate, in the sad conflict waged between the Church and State in France, is a sufficient evidence of this. Let the Papacy restore to the episcopate its historical and Biblical rights, which are just as divine and even more sacred than those of the Pope; and let it restore to the Christian people their Biblical and historical rights which were formerly exercised through the Christian Emperors and other sovereigns; then, and then only, can we have these lawful checks and balances which secure to each of the three divinely appointed *media* of Church government and discipline their valid and properly adjusted rights. Then we may hope for a speedy removal of all the other minor difficulties, and the Unity of Christ's Church, for which He prayed and died and now reigns, will be secured.

CHARLES A. BRIGGS.